





JOSE ROSALES 2017-07-04

THE BLACK BLOC WHICH WAS NOT/ COMMENTS ON THE HAMBURG G20 – ENGLISCH/DEUTSCH

NONPOLITICS BLACK BLOC, G 20, RESISTANCE, RIOTS

Could she be a member of the black bloc?

In the 1 July copy of the German newspaper Taz one finds the statements of two leftist organizations – *Campact* and *Interventionistische Linke* – each of which expresses their desire to be distanced from anything seen as 'criminal', and especially anything that can be associated with the *black block*. In the words of one *Interventionistische Linke* representative:

'We want a colorful event. [But] Black is too colourful.' A scene such as this seems to be something of a tradition within the German (reformist) left and rehearses a similar situation when, during the 1988 convention of the World Bank and IMF in Berlin, the Greens sought out discussions with world leaders while the Autonomen rejected any type of cooperation/reformism. Unlike today, one opens the September 1988 issue of Der Spiegel with a different tone being expressed regarding the arrival of world financial leaders to the capital: "While the Greens met to discuss alternatives to the existing world financial system…the Autonomen declined to cooperate with reformists vis-à-vis the IMF. Der Spiegel quoted one radical as saying: "A death machine can only be combated." Just as it was the case for this 'radical' in 1988 so too is it the case for those of us in Hamburg. In light of all the media attention leading up to the G20 summit, all one can really gather from these reports is the anticipation of any agreement between the Merkel-Macron alliance and Trump, and the arrival of the 'black block' and their riots. However it must be said: against the temptation of treating riots as something that detracts from the legitimate form of peaceful protest, or as something doomed from the start due to a perceived limitation inherent to the riot-form, Hamburg should receive the G20 and its affiliates in nothing but riotous fashion. As Joshua Clover has helpfully shown in his study on the historical relation between the riot and the strike, riots are a mode of struggle that simultaneously address themselves to police, the state, and capital. That is to

say, riots are not simply ephemeral and spontaneous expressions of discontent but are 'a mode of survival that seeks to resolve the crisis of the reproduction of labor within the spheres of circulation and consumption.' To détourn Stuart Hall's formulation: *riots are a mode through which class struggle is lived.*

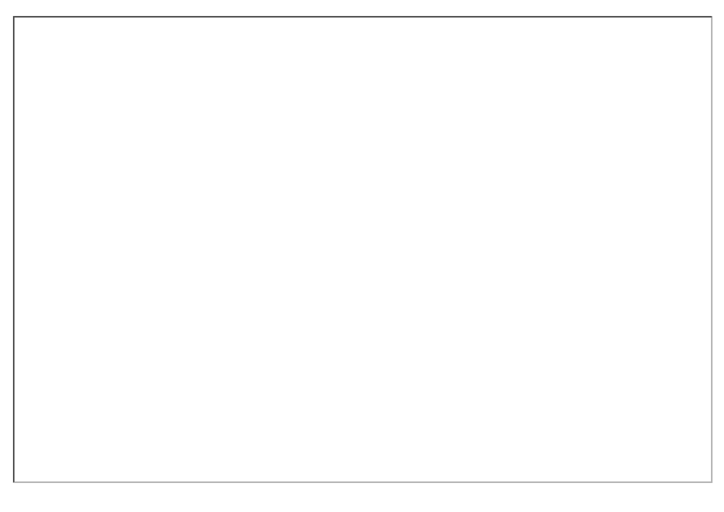
Regarding the police, however, riots respond to the reality of the function of policing understood as ensuring the security of an economic system that was born from, and needs to maintain, the subjugation of people of color, the poor, queers, women, migrants, and refugees. That is, the job of the police isn't to 'protect and serve', or to help any citizen whatsoever when they are in danger, but rather, to secure, defend, and maintain lucrative economic conditions at the national level for value production, as well as enforcing the illegality of subsistence outside the legally acceptable market of waged-labour. Again, it is this defense of capital and criminalization of those who resist becoming part of surplus populations that is being encountered once more in Hamburg. And as if to corroborate this claim of the police's inherent role in the protection of capital, Timo Zell, a spokesman for the Hamburg police helpfully puts to rest any remaining doubts: this year's G20 will be "the biggest operation in the history of Hamburg's police." It is because riots are a form of struggle that is equally anti-state, anti-police, and anti-capitalist, that the particular combination of police and capital at this week's G20 summit should be nothing short of a riotous affair.

So if riots should break out, don't be fooled into thinking that these are the problematic 'far left elements' of this week of protests; that there has ever been such a thing as a 'good', as opposed to a 'bad', demonstrator. It is the State that divides the masses between the good-citizen and bad-criminal, especially since it is with these so-called 'bad' and 'criminal' elements that anti-police and anti-state struggles are most effective. And, in fact, there has never been such a thing as a good protester as opposed to a bad one, just as there has never been such a thing as a good cop as opposed to a bad cop: in the confrontation with 20 world leaders there are only those who are for and against the G20's *raison d'état* (securing the existence and relative stability of global capital); there are only those who aim to preserve this world and those who want nothing short of bringing about its swift end. Even though it was the *Invisible Committee* who recognized the emerging consensus among various leftist currents regarding slogans such as ACAB or tactics such as riots, it is them who have also made recent attempts to reiterate the need for bringing about an end to this world with other slogans such as tout le monde déteste la police. While this slogan in English would read 'everyone hates the police', we find that a more literal translation is appropriate: *the whole world hates the police.*

The whole world hates the police because the police are the ones who, anywhere and everywhere, ensure the 'stability of the global economy', who call for 'peaceful and reasonable protest', and who even claim that hosting the G20 in a big city shows the world Germany's celebration of liberal rights despite the fact that the police have built detention centers and prisons specifically for those arrested during the protests and at the camps. If police officers can prepare spaces of confinement for those who exercise their state sanctioned 'rights' (the right to voice dissent through public assembly being the most relevant liberty in question vis-à-vis Hamburg) it is only because the kind of society afforded by Capital and its nation-states is one where the State claims to act as the guarantor of a set of universal rights while simultaneously arresting its citizens when the exercise of these rights conflict with the interests of the State. Thus, what should be obvious by now is the fact that everyone on the streets of Hamburg are all potential criminals from the point of view of the police, the state, and of capital. It is for this reason that we should not be duped by a discourse on the 'good' as opposed to 'bad' elements of the demonstration, since everyone is potentially already one of the 'bad ones.' And what of the reports predicting the biggest black bloc in history? Surely those individuals who are only recognizable by their all black, masked up, attire would qualify as the rogue elements of civilized protest? For us, however, it would be better to ask the following: is there really such a thing as this so-called 'black bloc' that we hear of so often and have allegedly witnessed on our computer screens? We ask this for the simple reason that, to this day, we are not certain if we have ever seen a black bloc.

THE BLACK BLOC WILL NEVER HAVE BEEN IN HAMBURG

Already in 2007, the ready-made artist Claire Fontaine identified why we feel the need to inquire into the existence or non-existence of this thing called black bloc. As Fontaine writes, 'the black bloc is you, when you stop believe in it.' And what led Fontaine to draw such a conclusion about this thing we hear so often about are the very reasons that allow us to say, in good faith, that we haven't seen a black bloc. For us as well as Fontaine, the black bloc is defined as 'that which exists insofar as everyone stops believing in its existence' because, today, it seems one can encounter the black bloc everywhere one goes. This includes everything from the evening news ("4 February 2007, on the 8 o'clock news I see what appears to be a male figure… throwing stones in a night lit by flames. He is wearing a very elegant Dolce & Gabbana bomber-jacket with a big silver D&G on the back and an immaculate white ski-mask") to mundane yet unexpected places such as the storefront signs at the Palais de Tokyo ("While my eyes follow the footsteps of customers going to the Black Bloc boutique at the entrance to the Palais de Tokyo… Agamben's words about the souls in Limbo automatically pops into my head: 'like letters without addresses…they remained without destiny").



While not in Hamburg, one can still find the black block at the Palais de Tokyo

In other words, the black bloc exists insofar as we understand that it is a word without image, a word that can be tied to any number of images and regardless of whether the images we associate with this term contradict the very things it comes to signify. If it is to be anything, the black bloc primarily exists as a word without image:

> …giving a place like that a name that evokes transgression or even the destruction of merchandise, while here we are selling our merchandise at high prices and we're loving it. Or maybe the black bloc sounded a bit like the opposite of the white cube, or the idea of a block bloc is suggestive, martial, what do I know?… It's not just appearances one shouldn't trust, one shouldn't trust words either. Or more specifically, the link we imagine exists between words and images…For example, we believe we've found the illustration of this concept in photographs of marching people dressed in black, black bloc is a word with an image. The term black bloc alludes to a manifestation of desire for collective opacity, a will not to appear and to materialise affects that are increasingly hard to take. The black bloc is not a visual object, it's an object of desire.

Thus, it is not a question of what black bloc really means, in essence or in the final analysis, and rather a question of subjective utterance: who is it that speaks about a so-called black bloc, and by doing so conjures up a correlating image to give meaning to their discourse? And for Fontaine, it is the State that has a vested interest in constructing a discourse that connects word with image; a discourse that thereby ensures that when we speak of the black blocs we are speaking of a particular image of existence:

> Instead let's ask what 'this is the black bloc' means? Who says that? Wouldn't that be a definition like an imaged filmed from a window, like the one from the 8 o'clock news…a definition shot from above, taken from the viewpoint of a watchtower, from some panopticon? What we are describing is always a block of ant-men, cockroach-men, a black block, which is black like the earth because it is seen from afar. But the carabinieri, they are also a black bloc. Baudelaire said that his contemporaries dressed in dark clothes that no painter enjoyed depicting, were an army of undertakers, that they were all celebrating some funeral. Enamoured undertakers, revolutionary undertakers.

Just as we shouldn't be fooled by the State's discourse on 'riots' and its participants from the 'hardcore fringe of the left', we shouldn't be duped into the State's paranoia surrounding the arrival of the *black bloc* as well; especially since it is the State that has constructed what this term has come to be known as in the popular imagination. That is, the 'black bloc' that we have come to know through news reports and media outlets are the images of window smashers characterized as rogue individuals acting opportunistically in the midst of the majority of good, peaceful, law abiding citizens. And, according to the State, it is these individuals that come to stand in for what it once meant to dress in all black. If this is so, then what it means to dress in all black, to wear masks, to de-arrest friends and fight to ensure their safety, what it means to engage in our mutual defense and a collective attack against the various ways this world does violence to us, this too, means that these modes of composition are not the black bloc. It means *that this thing we do with each other in the night where all demonstrators look alike isn't and in fact never was the black bloc.* Today, then, it would be better to say that the ones who arrive in Hamburg dressed in all black, who take to the streets to protect their friends and comrades, that they too are not the black bloc. And if these actions and images are not the black bloc, then, we would do well to recognize the fact that, perhaps, the black bloc will never have been in Hamburg at all. So, the next time you read some article about the *black bloc* at this years G20, or when you overhear some strangers talking about masked up hooligans destroying the city, or when you see images taken by helicopter of far away bodies shown to be causing chaos in the streets, remember that you are hearing about something other than what dressing in all black actually meant; and particularly what it meant not for the *'black bloc'* but for what, at one time, went by another name:

On the other hand, *schwarze Block* means something, it roots us in a history of resistance bound with the two 20th century

Germany's […] I could tell you that *schwarze Block* was a tactical form, that it was a means of preventing the police from identifying and isolation who committed what gesture during a riot. *I could tell you that dressing in black meant: we are all comrades, we are all in solidarity, we are all alike, and this equality liberates us from the responsibility of accepting a fault we do not deserve; the fault of being poor in a capitalist country, the fault of being anti-fascist in the fatherland of Nazism, the fault of being libertarian in a repressive country. That it meant: nobody deserves to be punished for these reasons, and since you are attacking us we are forced to protect ourselves from violence when we march in the streets. Because war, capitalism, labour regulations, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, those things are not violent, however you see those of us who want to freely live our homosexuality, the refusal to found a family, collective life and abolition of property as the violent ones. So, if you want to arrest me instead of my comrade just because we are wearing the same clothing, go ahead, I accept that, I don't deserve to be punished because he doesn't deserve it either… I could go on like this, and even provide you with more specifics, by supplementing it with the history of demonstrations, of victories, with dates to back it all up and everything, like the time a band was playing around the rioters in the deserted streets, or the time when the police took off running… I could go on for pages and pages, but that's not the issue here. All this isn't the black bloc.*

——————————————————-

In der Ausgabe vom 1. Juli findet man in der TAZ das Statement von zwei linken Organisationen – Campact und die Interventionistische Linke – , die sich beide von allem zu distanzieren versuchen, was allgemein als kriminell angesehen wird, und speziell von allem, was man mit dem Schwarzen Block assoziiert. Wir wollen einen farbenfrohen Event, aber Schwarz ist einfach zu farbenfroh, behauptet die IL. Solche Statements haben in der deutschen reformistischen Linken Tradition und rufen Erinnerungen an eine ähnliche Situation während der Tagung der Weltbank und des IMF im Jahr 1988 in Berlin hervor, als die Grünen geradezu obsessiv die Diskussion mit den Repräsentanten der herrschenden Klassen suchten, während die Autonomen jede Form der Kooperation und des Reformismus ablehnten. Der Spiegel stellte anlässlich des Zusammentreffens der Repräsentanten des finanziellen Kapitals fest, dass die Grünen diese treffen wollten, um Alternativen zum bestehenden internationalen finanziellen System zu diskutieren, während es die Autonomen sogar ablehnten, mit den Grünen zu paktieren, die an einem Tisch mit dem IMF säßen. Der Spiegel zitierte zudem einen Autonomen, der behauptete, dass mit einer Todesmaschine nicht diskutiert, sondern diese nur bekämpft werden könne. So wie dies damals für die radikale Linke unzweifelhaft feststand, so steht es für uns auch in Hamburg außer Frage, dass das Kapital auf der Straße bekämpft werden muss. Im Zuge der hysterischen Medienaufmerksamkeit, die inzwischen dem G 20 Gipfel zukommt, kann man nur annehmen, dass die Berichterstattung ganz auf das heimliche Einverständnis zwischen der Merkel-Macron Allianz und Trump auf der einen Seite, und den Aktionen des Schwarzen Blocks und der Aufstände auf dere anderen Seite ausgerichtet wird.

Gegen die Absicht, die Aufstände als etwas zu betrachten, das den legitimen friedlichen Protest verhindert, oder als etwas von Anfang an Aussichtsloses, das dem Aufstand inhärent ist, sollten in Hamburg die G 20 Repräsentanten und ihre Verbündeten nichts weiter als Aufstände erwarten. Wie Joshua Clover in seiner Studien zu den historischen Beziehungen zwischen Aufständen und Streiks gezeigt hat, beinhalten die Aufstände einen Modus des Kampfes, der sich unmittelbar gegen die Polizei, den Staat und das Kapital richtet. Aufstände sind kein spontaner und kurzlebiger Ausdruck der Unzufriedenheit, sondern sie sind ein Modus des Überlebens, der die Krise bezüglich der Reproduktion der Arbeitskraft in den Bereichen der Zirkulation und der Konsumtion zu lösen versucht, oder, um es in den Worten von Stuart Hall auszudrücken, Aufstände sind ein Modus, durch den der Klassenkampf gelebt wird.

Bezüglich der Polizei antworten die Aufstände auf deren verschiedene Funktionsweisen, die die Sicherheit und Funktionalität des ökonomischen Systems aufrechterhalten, was unter anderem auch die Unterjochung der Farbigen, Frauen, Migranten und Flüchtlinge beinhaltet. Die Aufgabe der Polizei besteht nicht darin, den Bürgern zu helfen und sie zu beschützen, wenn sie in Gefahr sind, sondern vielmehr darin, sowohl das ökonomische System auf nationaler Ebene zu sichern, zu verteidigen und aufrechtzuerhalten als auch diejenigen in die Illegalität zu drängen, die sich außerhalb des offiziellen Arbeitsmarktes und des Systems der Lohnarbeit befinden. Es handelt sich um die Verteidigung des Kapitals und um die Kriminalisierung derjenigen, die dem system zu widerstehen versuchen und kein Teil der Surplusbevölkerung werden wollen, und diese Frage steht auch in Hamburg zur Debatte. Als ob er die Rolle der Polizei richtig eingeschätzt hat, spricht der Pressesprecher der Hamburger Polizei von der größten Operation in der Geschichte der Hamburger Polizei; nicht zu unrecht, da der Aufstand eine Form des Kampfes ist, die gleichzeitig antikapitalistisch und antistaatlich ist und sich direkt gegen die Polizei richtet, insofern die Kooperation zwischen Polizei und Kapital auf dem G 20 Gipfel eine Möglichkeit für den Aufstand geradezu anbietet.

Wenn Aufstände ausbrechen sollten, dann seid nicht so dumm, daran zu glauben, dass ihn nur problematische ultralinke Elemente anzetteln, dass es den guten und den schlechten Demonstranten gibt. Es ist der Staat bzw.

der Verfassungsschutz, der die Massen in gute Bürger und schlechte Kriminelle teilt, speziell wenn die diese schlechten und kriminellen Elemente den entscheidenden Kampf gegen die Polizei und den Staat führen. Es gab nie einen guten Protestler, der dem Schlechten gegenüberstand, so wie es nie einen Unterschied zwischen einem guten und schlechten Polizisten gab: In der Konfrontation mit den Führern des G-20 Gipfels gibt es nur diejenigen, die für oder gegen den Staat und das globale Kapital sind, das heißt, es gibt nur diejenigen, die die bestehende kapitalistische Weltordnung beibehalten oder diejenigen, die diese Ordnung zerstören wollen. Das Unsichtbare Komittee hat die Möglichkeit aufgezeigt, ein Ende dieser Welt gerade mit Parolen wie „tout le monde déteste la police" zu fordern. Während die Parole in deutscher Sprache korrekterweise „Jeder hasst die Polizei" lautet, scheint die folgende Übersetzung angemessener zu sein: Die ganze Welt hasst die Polizei.

Die ganze Welt hasst die Polizei, weil die Polizei diejenige Institution ist, die nirgends und überall die Stabilität der globalen kapitalistischen Ökonomie sichert, zum friedlichen Protest aufruft und anzeigt, dass der G 20 Gipfel in einer Großstadt nichts weiter als von der deutschen Feier der liberalen Rechte zeugt, unabhängig davon, dass die Polizei Gefängnisse und Internierungszentren für diejenigen errichtet hat, die während der Protestaktionen festgenommen werden. Wenn die Polizei abgesperrte Räume für diejenigen einrichtet, die ihr legitimes Recht auf Demonstrationsfreiheit ausüben, dann nur deshalb, weil das Soziale, welches das Kapital und seine Nationalstaaten will, eines ist, bei dem der Staat für sich beansprucht der vollkommene Garant für die universellen Menschenrechte zu sein, während er gleichzeitig seine Bürger verhaftet, wenn sie Rechte wahrnehmen, die mit den Interessen des Staates konfligieren. Es sollte offensichtlich sein, dass jeder, der sich diese Woche auf den den Straßen Hamburgs befindet, aus der Sicht der Polizei, des Staates und des Kapitals ein potenzieller Krimineller ist. Aus diesem Grund sollten wir keinesfalls dem Diskurs des guten versus des schlechten Demonstranten folgen, da in Hamburg potenziell jeder zu den schlechten Demonstranten gehört.

Der Schwarze Block ist nicht in Hamburg

Wie wir uns vom staatlichen Diskurs über die Aufstände und die radikale Linke nicht verdummen lassen sollten, so sollten wir uns auch nicht auf die staatliche Paranoia einlassen, die den Schwarzen Block umzäunen will, speziell wenn es der Staat selbst ist, der die öffentliche Meinung zum schwarzen Block definiert. Den schwarzen Block, den wir aus den Nachrichten, den Medien und ihren Bildern kennen, ist eine Meute von Akteuren, die nichts weiter als Schaufensterscheiben einwerfen, Vandalen, die in der Mitte der Mehrheit von guten, friedlichen Bürgern agieren. Claire Fontaine erinnert uns daran, dass aus der Sicht des Staates dies Akteure sind, die sich alle in schwarz kleiden. Wenn sich diese Akteure tatsächlich in schwarz kleiden, Masken tragen und ihre verhafteten Freunde befreien, wenn sie sich gegen das zur Wehr setzen, was ihnen das System alltäglich an purer und struktureller Gewalt antut, dann sind dies anscheinend doch mehr als nur Akteure des Schwarzen Blocks. Vielleicht sagen wir im Moment besser, dass wir nicht der schwarze Block sind, sodass der Schwarze Block in Hamburg auch nie und nicht gewesen sein wird. Wenn Ihr die Nachrichten über den Schwarzen Block im Hamburg hört, der gerade wieder Amok in den Straßen läuft, dann wisst Ihr, dass es um etwas anderes geht, als das, was der Schwarze Block scheinbar bedeutet:

„Ich kann euch sagen, was es bedeutet, sich schwarz zu kleiden: Wir sind alle Genossen, wir sind alle solidarisch, wir sind alle gleich und diese Gleichheit befreit uns von der Verantwortlichkeit, einen Fehler zu akzeptieren, den wir nicht begangen haben: der Fehler, in einem kapitalistischen Land arm zu sein, der Fehler, ein Antifaschist im Vaterland des Nazismus zu sein, der Fehler, in einem repressiven Land libertär zu sein. Dies meint Folgendes: Niemand verdient es, aus diesen Gründen bestraft zu werden, und wenn du uns angreifst, sind wir gezwungen, uns vor der Gewalt zu schützen, wenn wir durch die Straßen marschieren." (Claire Fontaine, „This is not the Black bloc")

ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK
INSTAGRAM
TWITTER